

Build a Better Mousetrap

NATIONAL RECOGNITION PROGRAM FOR TRANSPORTATION INNOVATION



Source: USDOT/Getty



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

Build a Better
MOUSETRAP

CENTER FOR
LOCAL AID SUPPORT

Dear Local and Tribal Technical Assistance Program Centers,

We would like to thank you for your interest in recognizing innovative ideas in your State. For over a decade, the Build a Better Mousetrap national recognition program, formerly known as the BABM National Competition, has highlighted some truly amazing and locally relevant transportation innovations. Our goal is to share and celebrate this creative work. Whether the idea is big or small, these ideas change the way agencies perform their work. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is providing this process guide on nominating your local and tribal applicants.

We want to make this process as easy and rewarding as possible for you. Please submit as many nominations as you deem worthy under the four categories. The final winners will be announced at the National Local and Tribal Technical Assistance Program Annual Conference.

Thank you so much again for your interest. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at CLAS@dot.gov. I look forward to seeing all your submissions!

Sincerely,

Joe Conway
Director, FHWA Local Aid Support Team

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Overview

What is Build a Better Mousetrap?

The Build a Better Mousetrap (BABM) national recognition program highlights locally relevant, innovative solutions and provides a platform to share innovations to everyday challenges that local and tribal transportation professionals encounter on local roads. These local road solutions range from the development of new project delivery or design processes to the invention of new tools, equipment, or modifications that increase efficiency, enhance safety, reduce cost, and/or improve the quality of transportation on local roads.

What are the four BABM entry categories?

CATEGORY	DEFINITION	APPLICATION & EXAMPLE
1. Innovative Project	Any solution that addresses any or all phase(s) of the “project” life cycle—Planning, Design/Engineering, Construction, Operations, and Maintenance. This project shall introduce new ideas and be locally relevant, original, and creative in thinking.	Any or all phase(s) of the “project” life cycle—Planning, Design/Engineering, Construction, Operations, and Maintenance Example: BABM 2021 Honoree—The Hopper, Jones County, IA www.fhwa.dot.gov/clas/babm/2021/the_hopper_ia.aspx
2. SMART Transformation	A locally relevant, significant change in any transportation activity or process that is SMART, “Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time bound,” in nature that results in improved efficiencies.	Any transportation process, practice, or procedure Example: BABM 2021 Honoree—ADA Ramp Inspections Tracker, Seminole County, FL www.fhwa.dot.gov/clas/babm/2021/ada_ramp_inspections_tracker_fl.aspx

CATEGORY	DEFINITION	APPLICATION & EXAMPLE
3. Bold Steps	Any locally relevant, high-risk project or process showing a breakthrough solution with demonstrated high reward.	Any transportation project or process Example: BABM 2021 Honoree—Road Electric Training System (RETS), Illinois Tollway www.fhwa.dot.gov/clas/babm/2021/road_electric_training_system_rets_il.aspx
4. Pioneer	A locally relevant, product/tool that is among the first to solve a maintenance problem with a home-grown solution.	Any product/tool; maintenance solution in nature Example: BABM 2021 Honoree—Recessed Lane Indicator, Independent Highway District, ID www.fhwa.dot.gov/clas/babm/2021/recessed_lane_indicator_id.aspx

How to Participate

The Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) Centers shall host a local competition and select nominations they would like to enter the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) national recognition program:

- BABM is open to any local government agency (town, borough, city, township, county, or parish) and tribal governments in the United States.
- Applicants must apply to their nearest LTAP Center to qualify for the national recognition.
- Multiple nominations in multiple categories may be submitted. FHWA may ask for additional information during the evaluation process.
- Photographs are required to illustrate each entry, with owner's credit shown, and should be submitted as separate files.
- An optional Spotlight Video can be submitted to demonstrate the problem, development, and working solution.
- Centers complete the nomination form and submit their nominations to the Build a Better Mousetrap at CLAS@dot.gov.
- Applicants must respect Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) principles.

Previously submitted entries are not eligible for resubmission unless significant, unique, and innovative enhancements have been made to the entry. At its sole discretion, FHWA reserves the right to disqualify entries that fail to show that significant improvements have been made to a previously submitted product or technology. **Nominations are accepted only through the LTAP Center and are due by June 10, 2022.** Please submit electronically to CLAS@dot.gov.

How are the FHWA Honorees selected?

Honorees will be selected by an independent panel of judges and will be announced at the annual National Local and Tribal Technical Assistance Program (NLTAPA) Conference.

In each category, we are looking for original, innovative projects that provide long-term value to the transportation community. In selecting an Honoree, the following criteria will be considered:

- Overall Impact—Measure of the overall improvement, effectiveness, efficiency, savings, and/or benefit of the innovation as applied to the process or project where it has been implemented.
- Community/Agency Benefit—The extent and scope of the potential impact of the innovation on the transportation industry. Innovations that have the potential for broad/national impact beyond the local agency will be scored higher.
- Originality—Creativity of the innovation across the transportation industry.
- Applicability to Others—Extent to which the innovation may be easily adopted and implemented by peer local agencies and tribal communities.
- Cost Effectiveness—Cost savings (immediate and/or life cycle cost) of the innovation.
- Time Savings—Time, schedule, or efficiency savings of the innovation.
- Quality of the Submitted Application—Entries with a Spotlight Video will receive bonus points!

A top **Honoree** will be selected for each category. Honoree benefits include FHWA national recognition and promotion, exposure on the FHWA website, and the opportunity to have the innovation showcased at local and national transportation events. In addition, from the list of top Honorees, a **Best of Innovation** award will be made by casting votes at the annual NLTAPA conference.

All qualifying entries will be compiled into an electronic booklet and posted on the FHWA's Local Aid Support (LAS) website at www.fhwa.dot.gov/clas/babm so that you and your peers and customers can learn more about the best practices from around the country. The recognition of any submission does not constitute FHWA endorsement or support of the submission.

Build a Better Mousetrap Entry Form

Agency Name:

Agency Contact Person:

Agency Contact Person Phone #:

Agency Contact Person Email:

LTAP Center Name:

LTAP Center Contact Person:

LTAP Center Contact Phone #:

LTAP Center Contact Email:

LTAP Center Address:

Entry Title:

Category (check one):

Innovative Project Award

Bold Steps Award

SMART Transformation Award

Pioneer Award

1. What was the challenge (i.e., problem) or objective you set out to solve? Fully describe the challenge (up to 500 words max):
 - a. *Provide specific details on the issues you faced and why it needed to be addressed.*

2. How did you develop and implement your solution? (Up to 500 words max.)
 - a. *Provide details on how you developed, built, and implemented your solution to meet your objective(s). Address the originality of the solution and why you selected this solution.*

3. What labor, equipment, plans, or materials did it take to make the solution work?
 - a. *What did it take to make this solution a reality? Include design sketch, drawing, and materials list as applicable.*

4. What was the cost of implementation?
 - a. *Add supporting data, such as cost of materials, equipment used, etc.*

5. What was the positive impact/results/outcome of your efforts (e.g., long-term benefits, productivity, financial, personnel performance, benefits to the community, safety, etc.)?
 - a. *Include a discussion of data or evidence to support the outcome and/or the revised level of effort upon implementation to complete the job or process. Has this been shared? With whom? Results?*

Entry Checklist

Entry Form

Photographs (two minimum)

Spotlight Video (Please keep in mind that photographs are required;
a Spotlight Video is encouraged, but not mandatory)

Release Form(s) for image use

Release Form(s) for photo/video ownership

Photograph and Spotlight Video Guidance

PHOTOGRAPHS*

- Along with your entry, provide high-resolution digital photos measuring at least 300 dots per inch (dpi). A minimum of two (2) different photographs must accompany each entry.
- A camera that takes photos of 3 megapixels (MP) or more will be fine. When shooting digital photos, ensure that the camera is set to take shots at the highest resolution possible. For instance, a Samsung S5 will take 16 MP photos. An iPhone 6 takes 8 MP photos.
- Digital photos may be provided via email, CD-ROM/DVD, or a file transfer protocol (FTP) electronic address. Please provide original source files, either as a JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group) or TIF (Tagged Image File Format), *not* photos embedded in your Microsoft Word file.
- Photos should be interesting to view, and should support and illustrate the ideas and activities described in your entry, and—whenever possible—should show people or equipment in action. Ensure that all photos respect OSHA principles and exhibit safe and appropriate actions, such as workers wearing hard hats and safety vests.
- Each photograph should include a detailed caption explaining what is shown and clearly identifying its relevance to the subject of the entry. Also, include a photo credit (photographer's name and/or organization) or source (agency or company name).

SPOTLIGHT VIDEOS *

The Spotlight Video is an optional addition to your entry. If submitted, it should demonstrate your entry's problem, its development, and your entry's working solution. It should be no more than 5 minutes long and be in MP4 format. Submit it electronically or via CD-ROM/DVD. Staff at LAS can assist with these details. Here are some tips:

www.usatoday.com/story/tech/columnist/saltzman/2016/07/10/tips-shooting-great-video-your-smartphone/86806080

- **Plan your script.** Write it out on a large whiteboard so the narrator can easily see it.
- **Turn the phone sideways.** Use landscape, or horizontal, shots.
- **Hold your phone steady.** Use two hands with arms in close. Tripods work well also.
- **Compose your shot.** Place your scene in the middle. Avoid background distractions.
- **Lighting is critical.** Avoid harsh sunlight, dark and light contrasts, backlights, and windows. A bright but cloudy day is great.
- **Shoot straight, slow, and close.** Match the height of your image. Gently glide in for close-ups.
- **Sound matters.** Background noise is distracting. Shut down motors, fans, hammers, and conversations.
- **Editing is OK.** Download and edit your video with free or commercial software. Cut; crop; adjust color and brightness; and add transitions, special effects, music, narration, captions, and more. It's OK to ask a tech-savvy friend to help you.

* Please request a Release Form (see the next page) from each person you photograph, record, or video. Include a copy along with your entry.

Release Form

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Name: _____

Location: _____

Date: _____

I hereby grant to the FHWA, U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), its agents, contractors, and employees the absolute and irrevocable right and permission, in respect of the photographs or audio or video recording and their transcripts, that it has taken or has had taken of me, _____, or in which I may be included with others, to use, reuse, publish, and republish, and otherwise reproduce, modify, and display the same, in whole or in part, individually or with other photographs, in any and all media now or here after known, for illustration, promotion, art, advertising and trade, or any other purpose whatsoever, and to use my name and identity therein or by descriptive text or commentary in connection therewith if it so chooses.

I hereby release and discharge FHWA, DOT, its agents, contractors, and employees from any and all claims and demands arising out of, or in connection to, the use of the photographs taken on and ending on _____ in whatever media format used, including without limitation any and all claims for libel or invasion of privacy. I also understand that there will be no financial or other remuneration for recording me, either for initial or subsequent transmission or playback.

I am of full age and have the right to contract in my own name. I have read the foregoing and fully understand the contents thereof. This release shall be binding upon me and my heirs, legal representatives, and assigns. I further release the FHWA from any responsibility for injury incurred during the photography or audio or video recording session.

- ❖ I represent that I have read and understand the foregoing statement, and am competent to execute this agreement.

Signed _____

(If a minor, a parent, or legal guardian must sign and indicate both the child's name and the parent's name in the line below to constitute consent.)

Printed Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Fax Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Date: _____